

# ‘So what did you learn from war?’

## Violent decolonization and Paul Mus’s search for humanity<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article examines how and why the French Orientalist, Paul Mus, became one of the leading critics of the Indochina War and an advocate of French decolonization. Most studies of Western Orientalism tend to adopt Saidian approaches to demonstrate the degree to which Western scholars operated from within the confines of the wider colonial project and were influenced by it. Mus does not escape from this critique. However, like Jacques Berque in North Africa, Mus was one of a handful of French Orientalists who not only grew up and pursued their research in the Empire, but also became deeply involved in trying to understand the rising tide of colonial nationalism, the nature of French colonialism and the meaning of decolonization in new ways for the time. This article considers how war, and in particular the experience of violence in the colonial context, shaped Mus’s understanding of colonialism, his conception of humanity, and influenced his post-war writings in ways that distinguished him from colonial humanists in charge of the Republican Empire and Orientalists who continued to operate within the colonial power structure. In late 1949, Paul Mus left his position at the head of the French Colonial Academy to renew his pre-war academic career. However, unlike scores of social scientists who had also experienced war, Mus placed that very experience at the centre of his post-war scholarship.

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*Encore, qu’as-tu appris à la guerre?  
J’ai appris que rien n’est plus utile à l’homme que l’homme, et que rien n’est meilleur pour l’homme que l’homme.*

*Etrange ! Mais encore, qu’as-tu appris à la guerre?  
Aussi que les plus grands maux viennent de l’homme, mais que la menace humaine, continuellement perçue pendant des mois, n’affaiblit nullement cette amitié universelle, mais au contraire, à ce que j’ai éprouvé, la fortifie.*

Alain, *Mars ou la guerre jugée*, 1921<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is a much revised version of my earlier (2006) ‘Paul Mus en quête de l’humain’, in David Chandler and Christopher E. Goscha, *Paul Mus (1902–1969) : L’espace d’un regard*, Les Indes Savantes, Paris, pp 269–290. My thanks to Rachel Harrison, Peter Zinoman, Agather Larcher-Goscha, David Chandler and anonymous readers for their comments on this essay.

<sup>2</sup> Alain (1995), ‘Qu’as-tu appris à la guerre?’ in Alain, *Mars ou la guerre jugée*, 2 ed (1 ed, 1921), Gallimard, Paris, pp 128–131 (citation, pp 129–130).

Paul Mus was a famous French scholar who worked at l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient in colonial Indochina during the inter-war period. One struggles to place him in any one academic camp or school of thought. Trained as a sociologist and specialist in Asian religions, he crossed over into anthropology, philosophy, structuralism, history and, later in his career, what the French now call the 'history of the present' [*histoire du temps présent*]. He enjoys international notoriety to this day for his path-breaking studies of ancient South East and South Asian religions, myths and cultures – as he does for his wartime service. During the Second World War, he parachuted into Japanese-occupied Vietnam for Free French forces in order to use his Indochinese experience and contacts to help build up the resistance. He became famous during the Indochina conflict, when, as Director of the French Colonial Academy in Paris, he spoke out publicly against the army's use of torture. He lost his job as a result. Dividing his time between the Collège de France and Yale, he went on to publish articles and books critical of colonialism, colonial war and the extraordinary violence inherent in both. His work adumbrated that of French intellectuals opposed to the Algerian War (not least of all Pierre Vidal-Naquet) and would be picked up and deployed by many in the anti-war movement in the USA. Frances Fitzgerald's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Fire in the Lake*, a damning account of American intervention in Vietnam, is dedicated to and inspired by Paul Mus.<sup>3</sup>

Most Saidian approaches to colonially trained scholars such as Paul Mus focus on how they were influenced by the Western imperial project in which they operated and how they incorporated Orientalist notions of the 'other' in their scholarship.<sup>4</sup> Mus does not escape this critique. However, like Jacques Berque in North Africa, Mus was one of a handful of French scholars who not only grew up and pursued their research in the Empire, but who also became deeply involved in trying to understand the rising tide of colonial nationalism, the nature of French colonialism and the meaning of decolonization in new ways for the time. That Mus reoriented his thinking from within the colonial world – indeed as the director of the French Colonial Academy – only makes the study of this Orientalist all the more interesting.<sup>5</sup>

However, rather than taking up the Saidian approach or providing a description of Mus's transformation from Orientalist to something of an anticolonialist, I shall analyse his intellectual itinerary from another angle. This article considers how war and the experience of violence in the colonial context shaped Paul Mus's understanding of colonialism, his conception of humanity, and influenced his post-war writings in ways distinguishing him from colonial humanists of the time analysed by Gary Wilder.<sup>6</sup> The first half of this article examines how the experience

<sup>3</sup> Frances Fitzgerald (1972), *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*, Little Brown & Co, London. Mus is 'the Vietnam specialist' in Emile de Antonio's famous 'docu-critique' of the Vietnam War, *In the Year of the Pig*.

<sup>4</sup> The Saidian canon is well known. See the two founding texts penned by Edward Said (1978), *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Penguin Books, London; and (1994), *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage, London.

<sup>5</sup> The parallel between Mus and Berque is obvious. See Jacques Berque (1999), *Mémoires des deux rives*, Editions du Seuil, Paris; Jacques Berque and Jean-Paul Charnay (1965), *De l'impérialisme à la décolonisation*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris. Mus and Berque both find a place in Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, but Said clearly favours Berque over the more Orientalist-minded Mus in his view.

<sup>6</sup> Gary Wilder (2005), *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

of war crystallized Mus's humanism during the Indochina War, leading him to rethink the relationship between the French and the Vietnamese in ways that dissolved the colonial barrier. The second part of this essay shows how Mus then sought to communicate this message to the French public and the powers that be. This comes through powerfully in two collections of texts he produced during the course of the Franco-Vietnamese war in Indochina. These are his 1949–50 essays on the dehumanizing effects of colonial violence in the pages of *Témoignage chrétien*<sup>7</sup> and his use of Pierre Loti's account of the brutal conquest of Hue in the late nineteenth century. He uses both to analyse the 'disconnect' in the French colonial mind [*le déphasage colonial*] in the mid-twentieth century, all the while attempting to place the Vietnamese on the same level of humanity as the French.<sup>8</sup>

Paul Mus was one of many social scientists who saw combat in uniform. One could also readily mention Norbert Elias, Marcel Mauss, Marc Bloch, Pierre Renouvin, Edward Evans-Pritchard, Richard Tawney and Bernard Fall. But, as Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau has persuasively argued, what was striking about all of these veterans from the 'Academy' was their reluctance to speak of the 'face' of war, to borrow John Keegan's famous expression, or to draw upon their experiences to build or deepen their post-war work. One could even say the same for Mus's contemporary, Edmund Leach, working in colonial Burma against the Japanese.<sup>9</sup> What is so striking about Mus's post-1945 publications is the omnipresence of his wartime experience and its impact on his thinking. His four post-war books all focused on decolonization, war and its attendant violence. Mus's last book was a commentary on the letters sent from his son fighting in the Algerian War. Mus opens the moving *Guerre sans visage* by citing Rudyard Kipling's epitaph to his only son lost in the battle of Loos in 1915: 'If any question why we died/Tell them, because our fathers lied'.<sup>10</sup> Paul Mus's son, Emile, died in Algeria in 1960. War is everywhere in Paul Mus's post-1945 work, as is his search for humanity, '*la quête pour l'humain*', as he put it. These two things went together in his mind, not from the start, but certainly to the end of his life.

## The humanity and inhumanity of war

### *Paul Mus and the experience of war*

Until the Second World War, what Paul Mus learned of war came indirectly through the war literature of the inter-war period, the recollections of family and friends, and the ongoing international tensions in both Europe and Asia. Born in 1902, the young Paul barely missed being sent to the trenches when the Great War ended in

<sup>7</sup> Paul Mus, 'Les Vietnamiens aussi sont des hommes : Il faut reprendre notre information à la base', *Témoignage chrétien* (11 November 1949), p 1; 'Comment a commencé le drame d'Haïphong', *Témoignage chrétien* (18 November 1949); 'Qu'a démontré l'affaire d'Haïphong ?' *Témoignage chrétien* (25 November 1949); 'La leçon du drame d'Haïphong : il faut donner à l'Union française un corps qui ne soit pas seulement administratif', *Témoignage chrétien* (2 December 1949); 'Faut-il rayer de l'histoire les mots : vèpres hanoïennes ?' *Témoignage chrétien* (6 January 1950); and 'Nos soldats d'Indochine et nous', *Témoignage chrétien* (10 February 1950).

<sup>8</sup> Paul Mus (1954), *Le destin de l'Union française : De l'Indochine à l'Afrique*, Editions du Seuil, Paris.

<sup>9</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau (2008), *Combattre : Une anthropologie historique de la guerre moderne (XIXe – XXIe siècle)*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, chapter 1.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Mus (1961), *Guerre sans visage : Lettres commentées du sous-lieutenant Emile Mus*, Editions du Seuil, Paris.

late 1918. While the immediate Mus family was spared from the bloodletting, the extended family was not. His mother's family in Normandy lost, as Mus recalled later, 'four men out of five, uncles and nephews [alike ...]'.<sup>11</sup> Mus must have carried these memories with him. In 1967, two years before he passed away, he delivered a moving eulogy for one of his village's patriotic sons, a maimed soldier of the Great War and a long-time family friend, Monsieur Hilarion Icard. Not far from the village monument to its fallen soldiers, Mus spoke intimately of the personal tragedy of this veteran of the First World War: '[...] one can empathize with the young, twenty-five year old peasant who, upon the eve of his release from military duty, was snatched by the war, broken and rejected in a few weeks, leaving him handicapped for life, for all of his working life as a farmer'. Mus also evoked that day the loss of his only son, killed in combat in Algeria in 1960. Mus's son was buried not far from where M. Icard had been laid to rest.<sup>12</sup>

Most influential on Mus's early intellectual framing of war was his long relationship with the famous French philosopher, Alain (Emile Chartier, 1868–1951). Paul Mus's father, Cyprien, and Alain were close friends. They had been militant Dreyfusards and Alain was Mus's godfather and teacher for *khâgne* [preparatory arts classes] at the Lycée Henri IV in Paris, where Mus obtained his undergraduate degree in philosophy in 1921. In an incomplete, book-length meditation on Alain, Mus describes the thrill of studying under the 'master' and clearly sees Alain's experiences of the First and Second World Wars as a parallel to those of his own war-torn life.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, when the First World War broke out, Alain, at 46, left the security of the classroom to fight on the Western Front as an artilleryman. Despite his opposition to this conflict, he went, he said, because it was a duty. However, the horrors of the Great War and its impact on soldiers reinforced his thinking on the ambiguous mixture of humanity and inhumanity generated by such violence, expressed so powerfully in the quotation at the start of this article – a passage to which Mus increasingly returned as he grew older and the toll of war weighed ever more heavily on his own life (he opened with it in his requiem to his lost son). Unlike March Bloch upon his return to civilian life, Alain spoke openly of the horrors of combat and the experience of war. Indeed, he became a leading pacifist between the wars.

Mus's time with Alain inside and outside the classroom coincided with the latter's most intense reflections on the human condition and war. In 1921, Alain published a collection of hard-hitting essays on war and men, entitled *Mars ou la guerre jugée*. It was a view of battle, as seen and often written from the battlefields. Alain's unyielding yet cool-headed condemnation of the political powers generating such senseless violence is matched by his penetrating reflections on men in war and the human condition at its most revealing. *La guerre jugée* reminds one of other soldier-writers who came out of the war battered, disillusioned and wary of the politicians who had sent them over the top and sometimes out of their minds. Alain's critique of the 'system' in *Le citoyen contre les pouvoirs* (1926) and his *Souvenirs de guerre* (1937) echoes the wartime poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. And like them, Alain had no patience for glorifications of

<sup>11</sup> Mus, *supra* note 8, at p 106.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Mus (1967), 'Paysans et paysages : ense et aratro', *Esprit*, No 358, March, p 462.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Mus, 'Mémento politique', unpublished manuscript, held in the private papers of Paul Mus in the Institut d'Asie Orientale (IAO), Lyon, France.

war. As he wrote in *Mensonges à soi*, or *Lying to Oneself*, addressed to the young men whose heroic dreams of war had been shattered by the horrors of trench warfare:

'I've heard stories that men, at the time of the attack, lifted an officer on to the parapet, telling him: "You go first". You didn't expect that, did you? That's fine. You ran faster than destiny, marshalling all your forces as men and composing the nice image of a condemned innocent, marching off to be punished. But why do you want to console me? Why didn't you just tell me that you loved life and that it was hard for you to give it up? [...] Be a little honest with yourselves and fair above all. Perhaps you didn't even have the right to console women by lying. For this lie can kill yet another million young men within a decade.'<sup>14</sup>

Mus would cite this text too in his later writings. If anyone dispelled youthful visions of war as something 'heroic' or 'gallant', it was Alain. As Mus recalled the warning, 'No one was better disposed than Alain to warn my generation early on against the conventions favourable to collective irrationality and conformism, exploitable by those who know how to use them'.<sup>15</sup>

But there was more. Alain's personality and humanism left an indelible mark on Mus and others, including Raymond Aron, Simone Weil, Georges Canguilhem and André Maurois. One of Mus's classmates in *khâgne* in 1919, the writer Maurice Toesca, recalled the wonder he experienced under Alain's spell. Under Alain, he said, 'one had to search unceasingly for "the truth" in all its forms. Searching for the truth meant struggling against traditionalism in order to carve out new ways of thinking. One had to doubt in order to believe.'<sup>16</sup> Humanity and truth were at the heart of Alain's lessons in human dignity. André Maurois described Alain's magic in similar terms: 'That which I cannot convey [...], it was his animated classes into which we entered with the tenacious hope to discover, that very morning, the secret of the world and when we left [the same room] thrilled to understand that perhaps there was no secret, but it was nonetheless possible to be human and to be so nobly.'<sup>17</sup> It was for many an eye-opening experience. Mus would have agreed when Maurois wrote that Alain had instilled in him above all 'a horror for hypocrisy, a desire to understand, and respect for the adversary'. And Alain's insistence that war generated inhumanity and humanity at the same time is at the heart of Mus's later attempt to make sense of the violence he had encountered in the colonial context. This must have been a subject of conversation for the two men linked by family ties. It was certainly at the core of *La guerre jugée*. Though Mus probably did not fully grasp it at the time, he owed much to Alain. It is no accident that in Mus's private papers, now held at the Institut d'Asie Orientale in Lyon, rests his unfinished manuscript on his *maître*.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Alain (1921), 'Mensonges à soi', in *Mars ou la guerre jugée*, Gallimard, Paris, p 105. Returning to Alain in the wake of his son's death, Mus excerpted this text in his (1961) *Guerre sans visage : lettres commentées du sous-lieutenant Emile Mus*, Collection "Esprit", Editions du Seuil, Paris, and in *Memento politique*.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Mus, 'Alain casqué', in Mus, *supra* note 13, at p 8.

<sup>16</sup> Maurice Toesca (1952), *Nouvelle Revue française*, September, pp 28–34.

<sup>17</sup> André Maurois (1948), *Mémoires : années d'apprentissage et années de travail*, Flammarion, Editeur, Paris, p 57.

<sup>18</sup> Mus, *supra* note 13.



More than Alain, Mus was always proud of his military service. Between May 1926 and May 1927, the latter fulfilled his service at l'École de Saint Cyr, undergoing officer training in the 1st Battalion of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. Mus graduated with high marks as a second lieutenant.<sup>19</sup> His commanding officer was convinced that he would make an accomplished machine gun company commander. Particularly impressive were his intelligence and dedication: 'Men and the officers see in him an example of what energy and perseverance joined to intelligence can produce'.<sup>20</sup> For the time being, however, what preoccupied this young man most were Asia and the excitement of conducting research there. Writing from Saint Cyr in 1927, Mus asked the Director of l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) to support his request to serve out his reservist time in the colonial army in Indochina.<sup>21</sup> His wish was granted. He returned to Hanoi with his wife, served as an officer-reservist in the Indochinese colonial army, and joined the EFEO.

Significantly, before the end of the Second World War, Mus wrote nothing critical about colonialism in Indochina or the Empire. There is no indication in his publications or private papers that he spoke out against the bloody French repression of the nationalist revolt at Yen Bay or the bombing of communist-backed peasant uprisings in Nghe-Tinh provinces in 1930–31. And yet both events made the front pages of Indochinese and metropolitan newspapers and triggered perhaps the first public demonstrations, investigations and essays against colonial abuses in the Empire. Mus might have carried Alain with him to Indochina, but he had not yet thought about the question of colonialism or colonial violence (despite the fact that the French ruthlessly repressed the uprisings with the use of airpower in 1931).

If Mus was silent at this time, a handful of liberal, non-communist French journalists, intellectuals and Catholics whom Mus would later rally, were not. Leading the way was the newly founded Christian humanist review, *Esprit*. Mobilized by Yen Bay and Nghe-Tinh, *Esprit* increasingly took issue with the colonial repression of nationalist movements, the official propaganda designed to cover it up, and even the ideological foundations of the Third Republic's colonial project. In 1933, *Esprit* published the notes of Andrée Viollis's detailed investigation of the repression of the Vietnamese uprisings.<sup>22</sup> The founder of the review, Emmanuel Mounier, went further by printing Viollis's detailed account of the official use of torture against the Vietnamese in Indochina.<sup>23</sup> While the reactions from colonial defenders of France's *mission civilisatrice* were fierce, Mounier held his ground and made sure that the question of colonialism and decolonization remained subjects treated in the pages of *Esprit*.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> 24<sup>ème</sup> régiment d'infanterie (1927), 'Attestation', 19 April [May ?] 1927, signed lieutenant-colonel commandant le détachement, Box P94, Paul Mus, Archives de l'École-Française d'Extrême-Orient (hereafter cited as AEFEO), Paris.

<sup>20</sup> 'Extrait du rapport du 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon du 24<sup>ème</sup> Régiment (Caserne De Latour-Maubourg)', May 1927, Box P94, Paul Mus, AEFEO.

<sup>21</sup> 'Lettre de Paul Mus au Directeur de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient', Saint-Cyr, 7 August 1927, file: correspondance Paul Mus, 1951–1970, Box P94, Paul Mus, AEFEO.

<sup>22</sup> Which ultimately formed the basis for her famous indictment of French colonial abuses in (1935) *Indochine SOS*, Gallimard, Paris, with a preface by André Malraux.

<sup>23</sup> Andrée Viollis (1933), 'Quelques notes sur l'Indochine', *Esprit*, No 3, December, pp 401–448.

<sup>24</sup> Emmanuel Mounier (1934), 'Colonialisme et christianisme', *Esprit*, No 26, November, pp 283–286; E.M. [Emmanuel Mounier] (1934), 'Encore du colonialisme', *Esprit*, No 27, December; and Olivier Lacombe (1933), 'La colonisation devant la conscience chrétienne', *Esprit*, No 6, 1 March, pp 1013–1024. For more on *Esprit* under Mounier, see: Michel Winock (1996), "*Esprit*: Des intellectuels dans la cité, 1930–1950, 2 ed, Editions du Seuil, Paris.

Did Mus follow these debates in *Esprit*? If he did, it went no further than that at the time. He was much more bound up in his research than in politics. Nevertheless, this journal's questioning of the moral validity of French colonialism was part of the emergence of a humanist, non-communist intellectual anticolonialism, one to which Paul Mus would later be drawn when he took a public stand against torture and in favour of Vietnamese nationalism, publishing in *Esprit* and developing contacts with anticolonialists such as Jean-Marie Domenach and Andrée Viollis, as we shall see.<sup>25</sup>

The Second World War was the crystallizing point in Mus's conception of war and the devastating violence it could sow, as well as the humanity Alain had promised would spring from it. In September 1939, Mus was called to arms. At 37, he volunteered in early 1940 to fight on the French front.<sup>26</sup> In March, he commanded a section of Senegalese colonial machine gunners and French peasant-soldiers at Valvin and Sully-sur-La Loire.<sup>27</sup> For the first time in his life, he saw combat. In *Le Destin de l'Union française*, he provided detailed accounts of men engaged in the fury of combat and reflected on questions of primal fear and even desertion.<sup>28</sup> In a letter written after the war, he explained to a critic that if he had missed Charles de Gaulle's 18 June radio address, it was because he was 'engaged in all out combat' at Sully, 'killing Boches on the Loire River'.<sup>29</sup> His actions earned him the *Croix de Guerre*.

Though demobilized in October 1940 following France's rapid defeat in June, and posted to the AOF to oversee educational matters for Vichy in 1941, world war impinged on Mus's life a second time, this time via the Empire. Following the Allied landing in North Africa in November 1942, he volunteered for action in Charles de Gaulle's Free French forces. His military training, proficiency in Vietnamese and in-depth knowledge of Indochina made him a prime candidate for conducting clandestine resistance activities in French Indochina, still occupied by the Japanese. He was mobilized as a lieutenant in the Free French reserves and assigned to the *Mission militaire des Indes* in Calcutta for a year, where he underwent intensive commando training. In January, on orders from General Charles de Gaulle, Mus parachuted into Indochina to contact the resistance and rally the Vietnamese to the Free French cause. Significantly, Mus was in Hanoi when, on 9 March 1945, the Japanese overthrew the French colonial state. Disguised, he escaped by the skin of his teeth, marching some 400 kilometres with a colleague through hostile territory before linking up with French colonial troops retreating into southern China. While the Allied defeat of the Japanese a few months later put an early end to the Pacific War, Mus, still in uniform, was present at the final

<sup>25</sup> One of the rare non-communist French intellectuals to support the Vietnamese nationalist cause in the 1920s was of course André Malraux. But whereas Mus would come to share Malraux's recognition of the reality of Vietnamese nationalism by 1945, Malraux became a Gaullist nationalist and refused to speak out against the French colonial war in Indochina, or in support of some of the same Vietnamese nationalists whom he had defended so ardently in Vietnam in the 1920s.

<sup>26</sup> 'Note concernant la situation administrative de M. Paul Mus', File No 14, Box P94, Paul Mus, AEFEO.

<sup>27</sup> Mus, *supra* note 8, at p 163; and Paul Mus, 'Carnet du fonctionnaire', file Carnet du fonctionnaire : Fiche individuelle, Box P94, Paul Mus, AEFEO. Mus was an officer in the *19<sup>ème</sup> bataillon autonome sénégalais*.

<sup>28</sup> Mus, *supra* note 8, at pp 166–168, among others.

<sup>29</sup> 'Lettre manuscrite de Paul Mus, concernant ses activités pendant la Seconde guerre mondiale', Paul Mus Private Papers, Institut d'Asie Orientale, Lyon, France.

act of the Second World War. He accompanied General Philippe Leclerc's delegation to Tokyo for the signing of the historic armistice on 2 September 1945<sup>30</sup> – the very day Ho Chi Minh declared the reality of a new nation-state called 'Viet-Nam'.

Not only was Mus there at the end of the Second World War in the Pacific; he was also present at the beginning of France's first war of decolonization in Indochina. As a member of Leclerc's General Staff, he participated in the French reoccupation of southern Indochina. In November 1945, for example, he accompanied Colonel Jacques Massu's (mainly colonial) troops into Tay Ninh province in the face of heavy Vietnamese nationalist resistance and combat. In one instance, he personally intervened and negotiated the peaceful French occupation of religious temples where Vietnamese partisans had holed themselves up. General Leclerc awarded him the Légion d'honneur for his actions that day.<sup>31</sup> This French Orientalist was now directly involved in politics, including the restoration of French colonial order.

While Mus's military service ended in 1946, he continued to play a political role in Indochina for the French government and High Commissioner in Indochina until 1947, when he returned for good to the metropolis to resume the direction of l'Ecole Nationale de la France d'Outre-mer (ENFOM, formerly the Colonial Academy) and the Chair of Far Eastern Civilizations at the Collège de France. In a remarkable twist, Mus had not only acceded to one of the highest intellectual honours in France by joining the Collège de France, but had also assumed one of the most important positions in the French colonial establishment – the Director of the very academy designed to train colonial administrators to run the Empire.

#### *Colonial war and the crystallization of Mus's post-colonial humanism*

Paul Mus's experience of war irrevocably changed him, his view of humanity, of the 'colonized' and, perhaps most of all, of the colonizer. Like Alain, Mus discovered *l'Homme* in a new light in war – both the extraordinary violence of which he was capable and the remarkable humanity which he could show in such bloodshed. Unlike Alain, however, Mus's experience of war extended into France's colonial conflicts – conflicts that pitted the 'colonizer' against the 'colonized' in morally ambiguous conditions. Coming out of the war, Mus found it increasingly difficult to square a colonial system that placed some men above others with a wartime experience that had brought into focus their common humanity and equality. This was all the more so since he had dedicated his life to understanding the peoples and societies that were now being caught in the colonial crossfire. Like Jacques Berque and other liberal French 'Orientalists', Mus began to push his humanism in post-colonial ways different from the colonial humanism promoted by Republican ideologues such as Albert Sarraut, Robert Delavignette and Léon Pignon.

One important insight, which Mus himself undoubtedly possessed earlier, but which war crystallized in new ways, was that remarkable capacity to put himself

<sup>30</sup> 'Paul Mus à M. le Ministre de la France d'Outre-Mer', No 128/ENFOM, 13 February 1950, File 12, Box 132, I Ecole Coloniale, Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer (CAOM); and Paul Mus (1964), 'Japon, segment 45–63', *Esprit*, No 3, March, pp 422–431.

<sup>31</sup> Commandement supérieur des Troupes françaises en Extrême-Orient, Etat-Major, 1<sup>er</sup> Bureau, Ordre général 410, 'Citation du général de corps d'armée Leclerc à l'ordre de la division', Saigon, 28 May 1946, signed Leclerc, in File 12, Box 132, I Ecole Coloniale, CAOM.



in the shoes of the other and, now, in those of the colonized. This *retour sur soi* was an essential part of Mus's widening search for humanity and critique of colonialism, what he called *la quête de l'humain* – the search for the human. Alain had set it in motion; the experience of war had mobilized it. It was a subtle, almost imperceptible paralleling of the colonized and the colonizer. When Mus wrote of his Normandy family members wiped out by the First World War, as cited above, he added to that very same sentence (written after 1945): '[...] as in one of these villages in Sudan or the Upper Volta, where we recruited our commandos' [...]. African families grieved their lost ones as much as the French ones, he even added. It struck him again in 1940, when he fought with comrades at Valvin and Sully-sur-Loire: French and Senegalese peasant-soldiers appeared together as equals in Mus's wartime gaze. Such human paralleling across the colonial divide runs through all of Mus's work from 1945.

He could do this in increasingly more direct ways from this point, asking his French readers, for example, to put themselves in the shoes of the other, to do a humanizing test on themselves by trying to grasp the colonized's point of view, the other's humanity. Was the desire of the Vietnamese to obtain their independence truly that unreasonable? He posed that question in writing as early as 1946 and as head of the Colonial Academy. In *Le Destin de l'Union française*, published as colonial Indochina collapsed in the wake of Dien Bien Phu, he challenged his readers to try to imagine what it would be like if France had been occupied and colonized by a foreign power in 1944 – say, by the Americans – complete with their colonial myths of legitimization, a discourse of modernity and a heroic, national monument erected before the French Opera in Paris to commemorate their superior mission.

'But ask ourselves what our reactions would be standing before such a monument, sculpted on the orders of a hypothetical American (occupying) administration in France, if it represented the America of 1945 as a giant holding an infantine France by the hand, pulling it out of the morass [...] As for the Opera, in this utopian perspective, you would look on at it as built by the occupier, with its benefits there to be seen and then add to this the fact that it would take many years before the French could finally be allowed inside it in a normal (egalitarian) way.'<sup>32</sup>

If the French colonizers could put themselves in the skin of the colonized, Mus suggested, to see things from the other side of the colonial dividing line, then they just might grasp how Vietnamese nationalists saw the French themselves. As Mus explained his test:

'It's an exercise in transposition. It's not a question of abandoning that which is legitimate in our own positions or to deny against all evidence that the other side is without fault. But we must be more precisely aware of that which we have shown him [the Vietnamese] of us, of that which he has seen, that which he has not seen and finally, on a number of points, that which the other side saw

<sup>32</sup> Mus, *supra* note 8, at p 55. To drive home his point, Mus selected the *Opéra* in Paris, since the French colonial statue in Hanoi is located near the French-built opera house [*nha hat lon*] there.

in us for what we truly were, in our conventional representations, seeing us better sometimes than we knew ourselves on this matter.’<sup>33</sup>

This ability to approach problems from different sides of the human and historical experience became a powerful weapon in Mus’s hands – one that he would use repeatedly to get his French audience, often a very impassioned and jingoistic one, to *empathize* with the other, the adversary – above all the colonized, the nationalists, whom so many had written off as ‘anti-French’ [*anti-français*] as the Indochina War dragged on and the increasing violence created a wall of hate. Judging from the student evaluations of his teaching in Paris, even naval cadets on their way to fight in Indochina came away from his conferences impressed by what Mus had told them of Vietnam and of the Vietnamese.<sup>34</sup>

Mus’s capacity for empathy came from several sources. Alain’s human touch was always there. Mus’s liberal upbringing counted too. His father was a dedicated Republican, an educational reformist, a member of the *Ligue des droits de l’homme* and a Freemason. The elder Mus counted such Vietnamese luminaries as Tran Trong Kim among his good friends.<sup>35</sup> And while Mus had certainly grown up as a ‘colonial’ in French Indochina (he never denied it), he seems to have connected in his youth with his Vietnamese friends, classmates and servants, and spoke a little of the language. Mus’s fieldwork and research also drew him towards other cultures and peoples. And by all accounts, Mus was simply curious about everything.

More than anything else, however, his experiences in and of war pushed Mus’s humanism across the colonial divide. The contrast in his writing on Vietnam and decolonization before and after 1945 is clear. Fighting with African men in the battle for France in 1940 had undoubtedly encouraged him to think in wider ways; but witnessing the outpouring of Vietnamese nationalism following the 9 March coup in Vietnam was, in my view, the turning point. As the French colonial state crumbled before his eyes, Mus saw for the first time the extraordinary power of Vietnamese nationalism as it swept the country. This nationwide, patriotic outpouring changed him and his thinking profoundly. As he recalled the importance of that day, he stated: ‘that which I saw appeared as something beautiful and full of significance’.<sup>36</sup> If Mus had missed the Yen Bay and Nghe-Tinh uprisings in 1930–31, the Vietnamese and their revolution in 1945 seem to have bowled him over. It was present in, if not the driving force in his subsequent reflections.

Moreover, during the war, the Vietnamese – the ‘ordinary Vietnamese’ [*le petit peuple vietnamien*] as he would put it<sup>37</sup> – came to life in Mus’s thinking and marked his thinking deeply. Listen to how Mus recalled the empathy Vietnamese women

<sup>33</sup> Mus, *supra* note 8, at pp 53–56, p 54 for the citation.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Extraits comptes-rendus stage d’instruction des élèves de l’ECOLE NAVALE’, undated, circa 1947, Mus Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

<sup>35</sup> See file ‘Bibliographie de Paul Mus’, Box P94, Paul Mus, AEFEO. Paul Mus may have been a Freemason.

<sup>36</sup> Mus, *supra* note 8, at p 29. David Marr insists that the communist-led Viet Minh rode a wave of popular unrest to power in 1945. David Marr (1997), *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA. This may well be what struck Mus so powerfully too.

<sup>37</sup> This language is not simple colonial paternalism. Mus spoke in similar, intimate and human terms of *le petit peuple français*, above all his peasant friends, some of whom, as Jean-Marie Domenach opines, probably served as pall-bearers at his funeral in Murs in 1969.

had shown for his own sister, captured and imprisoned by the Japanese in Saigon in 1945:

'In my immediate entourage, I too have the memory of a "resistance fighter" from Saigon – my sister – put in a cage, beaten, suffocated slowly with a towel over her face, through which they [the Japanese] poured water. Only the arrival of the British saved her. They [the Japanese] had placed her in a cell, with Annamese prostitutes and street vendors *du plus petit peuple*. They left her in there for three days without food, to set an example, and worse, without water. But these poor women consoled her, caressed her hands and one of them went to cover the peep-hole in the door while others secretly brought a cup of water for this French woman who could speak a bit of their language.'<sup>38</sup>

The Second World War and the Indochina conflict emerging from it crystallized in Mus's mind that the Vietnamese were men and women deserving the same level of respect as his own fellow citizens. For perhaps the first time, Mus broke the colonial mind barrier and began moving in a new historical and human dimension. Gone was the division of the world and its men into the 'colonizers' and the 'colonized', the first supposedly superior to the latter. On the horizon, Mus saw a new, inevitably postcolonial order, in which all men would be accepted as equals. While he still hoped to maintain a special link to the Vietnamese via the *Union française*, from late 1945 this French Orientalist, raised in colonial Indochina, was now moving beyond the Eurocentric colonial humanism and reformism of the Third Republic. This would get him into trouble very soon (see below).

Mus's analysis of colonial representations and iconography confirms this shift and is essential to understanding his subsequent work on Vietnamese nationalism and French decolonization. In *Le Destin*, for example, he describes how the colonial statue of Paul Bert in Hanoi depicts the French governor towering over his small Vietnamese pupil. Bert holds the hand of the little boy as colonial France leads colonized Vietnam down the road to progress and civilization. Mus contrasts this colonial representation with the two French-built statues dedicated to Generals Foch and Pershing, erected along the River Seine in Paris in the aftermath of the First World War. Unlike the Franco-Vietnamese relationship, the American and French statues 'are precisely the same size'.<sup>39</sup> His message is clear: in the colonial mental order, the Vietnamese were perceived as children – not as men. The colonized were not on the same human and historical playing field as the French and the Americans during the First World War. As the French statue Mus put on the cover of *Le Destin* shows, the 'colonized' stood below the 'colonizer' in the colonial world view, whatever the Republican spin on it. Galliéni is held up by the figures of Sudan, Tonkin, Madagascar and Paris, symbolizing the four major stages of his politico-military career and military conquests.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Paul Mus (1977), 'Coup dur sur le fleuve Rouge', in Serge Thion, ed, *L'angle de l'Aise*, Hermann, Paris, p 52 (my emphasis).

<sup>39</sup> Mus, *supra* note 8, at p 55.

<sup>40</sup> On French colonial paternalism, see Mus, *supra* note 10, at pp 168–170. Mus clearly drew upon his earlier work on Angkor, Bayon and Borobudur architecture and symbolism in the development and articulation of his textual and symbolic critiques of colonial discourse, myths, images and statues. In many ways, Mus's critique of colonial representations foreshadowed some of the approaches now used in postcolonial studies.

While many French people, on 9 March 1945, considered the reoccupation of Indochina to be their national right, Mus returned to France from Hanoi in mid-1945 ready to insist that the Vietnamese had legitimate claims – including the right to national independence. Long before his official counterparts on both the left and the right, Mus knew that a major historical shift had occurred on 9 March. It was foolish and obtuse, Mus countered, to think that the Vietnamese ‘are just waiting for us to come back’, as one high-ranking French official put it to Mus at the time.<sup>41</sup> France would have to deal with the reality of Vietnamese nationalism in particular and decolonization in general. On 1 August 1945, over two weeks before the ‘August Revolution’ occurred and a month before Ho Chi Minh declared the existence of the new nation-state named the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRV), Mus penned a prescient internal memo for the French government on the need to conceive and adopt a new, liberal colonial policy, one which would recognize the Vietnamese desire for national independence. In this *Note sur la crise morale franco-indochinoise*, he urged his government to take the Vietnamese seriously. In this first written articulation of his widening thinking on decolonization, Mus called on de Gaulle and his own newly liberated national government to build a new relationship with the Vietnamese, not against them. The French had to treat them as equals, for the times had changed and so had the mindsets. While Mus was most definitely still a part of the colonial system, he was convinced that a peaceful decolonization of Vietnam could occur, one which would recognize Vietnamese national independence within the framework of a French Union. However, brute force and military reoccupation without high-level political recognition of the reality of the emerging Vietnamese nationalism was a recipe for disaster. The ‘colonial question’ could no longer be viewed uniquely from the French perspective – the ‘colonized’ had to be brought into the equation and treated as men and as equals – but most certainly not as children waiting for the French parents to return to take their hands;<sup>42</sup> otherwise, Mus predicted in ominous terms, the Vietnamese would take up arms and fight for their independence.

Mus’s thinking evolved further as the French tried to restore the colonial order by force, first in southern Vietnam, then in the rest of the country. He insisted that the Vietnamese opposed to the reinstallation of French colonialism were not a minority of left-wingers, but rather represented the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of the population. Nor were they simple ‘bandits’, ‘a few ringleaders’ or even ‘anti-français’, as a resurrected colonial discourse had already begun to spin them. They were ‘patriots’, he wrote, parallels to the French *masquiards* opposing German occupation. In one of his last reflections from the Vietnamese battlefield, Mus speaks of Vietnamese crossovers to the French Expeditionary Corps during the reoccupation of Cochinchina in December 1945 – men who had decided to put down their arms in the heat of battle and trust the French. In *Un matin de décembre en Cochinchine*, one can see Mus’s humanism coming into sharper focus as he began to see things from both sides. On that violent December morning in southern Vietnam, Paul Mus deliberately wrote in French, on the sign

<sup>41</sup> Paul Mus (1952), *Viêt-Nam : Sociologie d’une guerre*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, p 51.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Mus, ‘Note sur la crise morale franco-indochinoise’, Paris, 1 August 1945, File 1219, Box 134, Nouveau Fonds, CAOM. My thanks to Stein Tonnesson for providing a copy of this document.

hanging outside the French military post where these Vietnamese men had apparently crossed over, the words 'Vive le Viet Nam!'<sup>43</sup> He placed it next to 'Vive la France!' and concluded his paralleling as follows:

'Take a good look at these patriots. Not only are they experiencing a unique moment in their lives, but it is also a grave moment in our history. These men listened to us. They have just renounced violence. Now here they are faced with the future that this choice has now imposed upon them. What did we do, them and us, that morning in Cochinchina? The answer to that question is to be found in part on their faces. You will find there dignity and sadness. On several, without a doubt, even desperation. *Reflect too upon ourselves ...*'<sup>44</sup>

This is what Mus would do and ask the French to do in the following years: *un retour sur eux-mêmes*. They would also have to rethink themselves, for peaceful decolonization depended on it. Mus published this essay in March 1946, as the French and Vietnamese tried to negotiate the national reality of 'Viet Nam' peacefully. The possibility of doing so, he said then, 'had not necessarily been lost from the outset in Cochinchina'. Of course, we now know that the stubborn French refusal to recognize 'Viet Nam' would, as Mus predicted, lead to war.<sup>45</sup> And as it did, it was only a question of time before Mus's changing humanism, troubled conscience and commitment to the 'the Truth' instilled in him by Alain and his upbringing forced him into the open and into trouble. He was one of the remarkably few non-communist French intellectuals to break with the French war in Indochina at the time. And the fact that he was not just a colonial official, but the head of the Colonial Academy itself, makes his action all the more extraordinary.

### Paul Mus and the violence of colonial warfare

#### *Paul Mus and the 'obsessive fear of the horrible'*

Paul Mus returned to France for good in 1947, as full-scale war now raged in Vietnam, to resume the direction of the Ecole Nationale de la France d'Outre-mer. In so doing, he became directly involved in training French colonial administrators to run the French empire itself. While he continued to ask the French to take Vietnamese nationalism seriously,<sup>46</sup> at the outset he kept his disagreements low-key in light of his official responsibilities, and he undoubtedly felt he could best promote peaceful French decolonization from the inside, via the creation of a French Union and via the classroom. There is little in Mus's papers or the Academy's archives about what Mus said or did at this time. We do know, however,

<sup>43</sup> Paul Mus, 'Un matin de décembre en Cochinchine', in Mus, *supra* note 38, at p 40.

<sup>44</sup> Mus, *supra* note 38, at pp 24–25 (my emphasis).

<sup>45</sup> In January 1947, at war, Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu outlawed the use of the words 'Viet Nam', as the French sought to rebuild the Indochinese colonial state they had lost on 9 March 1945. Thierry d'Argenlieu ordered his subordinates to use the words 'Viet Minh' since this transformed the DRV into a political party among others, thereby denying it national reality as 'Vietnam'. The army would turn to an even more dehumanizing term: 'les Viet'. Like the statues of Pershing, Foch and Bert, these words, Mus insisted, were not neutral.

<sup>46</sup> He expressed his ideas in several conferences and specialized publications. See, for example (1946): 'L'Indochine en 1945 : quelques souvenirs et une opinion', *Politique Etrangère*, Vol 11, pp 349–374, and (1947) *Les cahiers des Droits de l'Homme*, 22 October, pp 251–253.



that in his classes Mus sought to communicate his humanist message. A series of teacher evaluations leave no doubt: 'Mus's talent resided in the importance he assigned to getting us to understand the psychology, the soul, and the evolution of the spirit of this people'; 'He knew how to analyse in depth the human problem in Indochina ...'; 'He led us to discover the human face of the Vietnamese ...'; or 'He made us feel the need to empathize in order to crystallize in our mind and heart the mentality and the reactions of another people, with whom we will all soon be dealing'. These were all from naval cadets passing through the school.<sup>47</sup>

However, the deterioration of the military situation in Indochina and the incapacity of French governments (including the socialists) to admit the national reality of the DRV put Mus in an increasingly difficult position as Director of the Colonial Academy. Things came to a head in July 1949, when the liberal and widely read Catholic newspaper, *Témoignage chrétien*, published Jacques Chegaray's disturbing and documented account of the French army's use of torture in Indochina.<sup>48</sup> Chegaray described how torture had become banal and widespread in the French army and he deplored its dehumanizing effects. His description of the atrocious torture of a Vietnamese woman brought home the point all too chillingly for Mus and shocked a French public which had until then been largely shielded from the unpleasant realities of 'pacification' in Indochina.<sup>49</sup>

Mus must have known before 1949 that the French army was using torture in Indochina. In May 1946, Nguyen Van To, one of Mus's former Vietnamese colleagues at the EFEO, a non-communist patriot and one of modern Vietnam's best scholars, boldly denounced the French use of torture in the pages of *Le Peuple*.<sup>50</sup> Other Vietnamese did the same.<sup>51</sup> Even General Jean Valluy, in charge of ground troops in Indochina, had to issue orders to stop its use in mid-1946.<sup>52</sup> But it never stopped, and in late 1947, Nguyen Van To himself was killed while 'attempting to escape' French paratroopers sent in to decapitate the Vietnamese nation-state. Mus was deeply affected by this sad news, and his criticism of it cost him support in official quarters.

Whatever the real reasons for Mus's decision to go public in 1949,<sup>53</sup> Chegaray's

<sup>47</sup> 'Extraits comptes-rendues.....', *supra* note 34, at pp 1–6.

<sup>48</sup> Jacques Chegaray (1949), 'Les tortures en Indochine : A côté de la machine à écrire le mobilier d'un poste comprend une machine à faire parler', *Témoignage Chrétien*, 29 July, p 3.

<sup>49</sup> Jules Roy was one of the few other French intellectuals to speak out against torture from within the system. He quit the army disgusted by the practice during the Indochina War. See Jules Roy (1989), *Mémoires barbares*, Albin Michel, Paris, pp 464–584, especially pp 489–490.

<sup>50</sup> Nguyen Van To (1946), 'Les atrocités françaises en Indochine', *Le Peuple*, Nos 12–13, 19 May, p 2; Nguyen Van To (1946), 'La réunion des trois Ky', *Le Peuple*, 7 April; and Nguyen Van To (1946), 'Il nous faut l'indépendance', *Le Peuple*, 21 April.

<sup>51</sup> Le Lai (1946), 'A Saigon, on torture', *Le Peuple*, No 15, 25 May, p 3.

<sup>52</sup> J. Bodin (1992), *Les officiers français, 1936–1991*, Perrin, Paris, pp 238–239.

<sup>53</sup> Mus's break in August 1949 may have been linked to the French decision to use Bao Dai to create and lead a counter-revolutionary Vietnamese state. In April 1949, Bao Dai returned to Vietnam, as the Chinese communist army crossed the Yangzi on its way towards the Indochinese border. Mus considered such a monarchical solution a farce, symbolic of yet another French failure to take Vietnamese aspirations seriously. But as Director of the *Ecole nationale*, such hostile ideas would not have won him any allies in policy-making circles. The most we can say is that, as the war became bogged down, it must have been increasingly difficult for Mus to square his ideas on the need for the decolonization of Indochina with his superiors' refusal to recognize the reality of a postcolonial world. It was also in 1949 that Mus began discussions with Yale University to allow him to teach in the USA. Lastly, Mus was very close to Louis Caput, a long-time friend from Indochina and an ardent opponent of colonialism within the socialist party. In letters to Mus, Caput repeatedly expressed his discontent with French policy and in particular the French Left's inability to decolonize. Mus Papers, Library of Congress.

article ignited something in Mus. For one, torture ran against everything in which Mus believed as a humanist. It was the ultimate degradation of the individual and his humanity, of both the victim and the torturer. The title of his first essay published in August – *Non, pas ça! No, not this!* – captured his anguish only too well. In it, Mus publicly condemned the use of torture by both the French and the Vietnamese.<sup>54</sup> However, if Mus took up the pen out of the moral outrage he felt upon reading Chegaray's article, the seven essays he went on to publish in *Témoignage Chrétien* extended well beyond the subject of torture, making it clear that he had decided to take a stand publicly and make his ideas known. It was Mus's first concentrated attempt to discuss the dehumanizing effects of colonial war, even if it meant taking up the horrific realities of its intrinsic violence. The French refusal to recognize Vietnamese claims as men and as a nation struck at his humanism and severed the only bond which could, he felt, underwrite a peaceful decolonization of Vietnam *and* France, create a new and lasting relationship between the two peoples, and reconcile their men on the battlefield.

Turning to Alain's writings and drawing upon his own wartime experience, Mus put his ideas and career on the line. He was determined to get the readers of *Témoignage chrétien*, at least, to see the Vietnamese as human beings. To do this, he understood that he would also have to take on the official lies and propaganda which had transformed the Vietnamese in French public opinion into faceless 'Viet Minh', 'ringleaders' [*quelques meneurs*] or the authors of gruesome civilian 'massacres'. Mus must have recoiled when he had read how a French colonel practising torture in Indochina justified it to Chegaray, insisting that the enemy atrocities were 'twenty times more cruel': 'Ask those who lost all their families in Hanoi on 19 December! French women were burned alive.'<sup>55</sup> While in fact no French women, to my knowledge, were burned alive on 19–20 December 1946, Mus understood that such language and representations were transforming the war into a holy war, widening the gulf between the French and the Vietnamese, the 'horrors' of which would be used to justify continuing the war in increasingly brutal and dehumanizing ways.

'The author of the present note has always refused to feed political polemics, vain in and of themselves. But here he is letting his conscience speak. I refuse to tell myself that French soldiers are by nature torturers. I refuse to tell myself that in France the press as well as moderate and conservative milieux deliberately close their eyes to these excesses because they judge it as a way of breaking the enemy. But I do not refuse any less resolutely to eliminate facts which, in four years, have raised a harvest of hate between Vietnamese and French and which, being the old colonial I am, I find today disconcerting.'<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Paul Mus (1949), 'Un témoignage irrécusable sur l'Indochine: Non, pas ça!', *Témoignage chrétien*, No 266, 12 August, p 1. Mus made it clear that his argument applied to the Vietnamese as well. They were also capable of such dehumanizing acts. Indeed, he chose 'non, pas ça' [No, not this !] because, Mus wrote, it was 'the cry of one of ours, [a French soldier] parachuted into Nam Dinh, whose buddy, who landed on an adjoining roof heard him scream "No, momma, not this", as two Vietnamese women cut his throat open in the form of the Croix de Lorraine, before doing worse. So "not this" goes for both sides.' *Ibid*, p 2. On the Vietnamese use of torture, see Goscha (2007), 'Intelligence in a time of decolonization: the case of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at war (1945–1950)', *Intelligence & National Security*, Vol 22, No 1, pp 100–138.

<sup>55</sup> Chégaray, *supra* note 48, at p 3.

<sup>56</sup> Mus, *supra* note 54, at p 1.

Mus had at least two goals in mind in his *Témoignage Chrétien* essays: to humanize the Vietnamese in French eyes and to dissect and debunk mendacious French atrocity stories preventing them from doing precisely that. ‘No nation,’ he wrote, ‘if it overlooks the human value of another nation will be able to save its own humanity at home, and will lose a lot more in trying to do so’ through violence. Mus explained that ‘this conviction alone imposes upon us a duty, whatever the costs, to say no to this escalating campaign being conducted in a climate of hate’.<sup>57</sup> Mus also turned to Alain for guidance, as he publicly took a stand. He insisted throughout his *Témoignage chrétien* essays on the importance of ‘establishing the truth’, to combat hypocrisy and lies, and to do so dispassionately: ‘If we want to break this infernal cycle, we must check our passions, on both sides, and avoid adopting too easily the attitude of the redresser of wrongs’.<sup>58</sup>

It was in this context that Mus analysed the Vietnamese ‘massacres’ of Europeans in Hanoi on 19 December 1946 – already baptized by French propaganda as the ‘Hanoi Vespers’ (*les vêpres hanoïennes*)<sup>59</sup> – and the underpublicized French bombardment of civilians at Haiphong a month earlier, which inflicted far greater casualties on Vietnamese civilians. The two ‘incidents’, one overblown and the other euphemized, went together in Mus’s mind. As the two parts of the title of one of his most famous essays captured it: ‘Go back to the source of the information’ for ‘the Vietnamese are also human’.<sup>60</sup> Having framed his approach in this way, Mus turned to deconstructing the atrocity stories, above all the Hanoi Vespers. He systematically compared and confirmed his information. He conducted interviews with members of the *Sûreté* who had run the investigations into these matters. He consulted archives off limits to others and drew on his personal and family connections in Hanoi and Saigon.<sup>61</sup> He showed, among other things, that fewer than 40 Europeans had been killed during the outbreak of war on 19 December 1946. Responding to an ‘atrocity’ story penned by a French writer and politician, Mus retorted:

‘Two hundred French civilians were not killed and tortured. The definitive list of which I’m in possession shows thirty-seven names. Do not accuse me of any other aim than that of determining the truth – a vital, necessary one – when I say that these are murders and inexcusable ones, but neither the facts nor the numbers allows this to be assimilated to the butchery M. Frédéric-Dupont marched out before his eyes and ours in his sanguinary texts.’<sup>62</sup>

Mus added that the victims were not tortured with ‘determination’, as many journalists had alleged. Without minimizing the violence that had most certainly

<sup>57</sup> Paul Mus (1949), ‘Les Vietnamiens aussi sont des hommes’, 11 November, p 1.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Mus (1949), ‘Comment a commencé le drame d’Haiphong’, *Témoignage Chrétien*, 18 November, p 2.

<sup>59</sup> An obvious allusion to the massacre of French occupying troops in Sicily beginning on the first day of Vespers in 1282. For Mus’s critique of this association, see Mus, *supra* note 41, at p 319, and above all, Mus (1950) ‘Faut-il rayer de l’histoire les mots : vêpres hanoïennes?’ *Témoignage chrétien*, No 287, 6 January, pp 1–2.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Mus (1949), ‘Les Vietnamiens aussi sont des hommes : Il faut reprendre notre information à la base’, *Témoignage chrétien*, 11 November, p 1.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Mus (1949), ‘Les Vietnamiens aussi sont des hommes’, *Témoignage chrétien*, 11 November, p 2 (‘Mais il y a des documents’). Mus had grown up in Indochina with a number of the *Sûreté* inspectors.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p 2.

occurred, Mus insisted that the media and certain French authorities had no right to create or traffic massacre stories for political ends. Worse, they had no right to let such stories transform the Vietnamese opposed to the return of the French colonial order into faceless savages – ‘les Viet’ as Chegaray’s colonel had put it – bent on killing, disembowelling, burning and raping. To make his point, he turned the tables yet again, asking the French to do a *retour sur soi*:

‘Brutal massacre: But haven’t we known similar things, among the French themselves, every time that a riot or a revolution breaks out in a big city? Putting aside all political considerations, this [the charge of hundreds of massacred] makes for a heavy tally. But it’s not a reason to disqualify a race with images only too hastily presented: the slow death of two hundred innocents “cut up like at the butcher”, sliced into pieces on stakes or burned.’<sup>63</sup>

The details of Mus’s textual deconstruction of the ‘Hanoi Vespers’ can be found in his *Témoignage Chrétien* articles and elsewhere. A detailed study of the atrocities of 1945–46 still awaits its historians.<sup>64</sup> What is important to note here is that long before critical media studies grew out of the Vietnam War as an academic field, Mus had called into question official propaganda and politically minded journalism and had attempted to explain the process of such intoxication, its mechanisms, its meaning and its political and human implications. In his *Témoignage Chrétien* articles, he brought insights gathered from philosophy, anthropology and sociology to bear on how events are studied, reconstituted, perceived and distorted. While I have found no evidence of a direct connection, it is worth noting that Marc Bloch had published a famous article in 1921 adumbrating Mus’s colonial parallel, entitled ‘Réflexions d’un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de guerre’. It is hard to believe that Mus would have been unaware of this earlier, path-breaking study penned by a veteran of the First World War.<sup>65</sup>

One of the major ideas arising from Mus’s essays in *Témoignage chrétien* is what he called the *hantise de l’horrible* or the obsessive fear of the horrible. He observed how massacre stories, such as those arising from the Hanoi Vespers in 1946 and *la Cité Héroult* killings in Saigon in 1945, not only transformed ‘the Vietnamese’ into threatening enemies, but they generated the fear needed to repeat this process over and over. As distorted as this image of ‘the Vietnamese’ might be, the process was very real, capable of shaping French public opinion, legitimating the continuation of the war and, worst of all, dehumanizing the enemy by turning it into that faceless, monstrous ‘Viet’ or ‘Viet Minh’.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p 2.

<sup>64</sup> Philippe Devillers (1952), *Histoire du Vietnam de 1940 à 1952*, Editions du Seuil, Paris; Stein Tonnesson (1987), *1946 : Déclenchement de la guerre d’Indochine : les vèpres tonkinoises du 19 décembre*, L’Harmattan, Paris; and Martin Shipway (1996), *The Road to War: France and Vietnam, 1944–1947*, Berghahn Books, Oxford. Based on research in the French archives, Tonnesson says that Mus’s claim that around 6,000 civilians died during the bombing of Haiphong may be too high, but he adds that the bombing certainly cost the lives of thousands of Vietnamese civilians, not hundreds as Mus’s detractors claim. See Tonnesson, pp 101–106 (p 106 for Tonnesson’s estimate). That said, we have no detailed study of the massacres that most certainly occurred in Saigon in September 1945 and in Hanoi in December 1946, the myths both generated, or the extent to which Mus’s analysis of the massacres above was influenced by his need to ‘parallel’ French and Vietnamese violence (Hanoi, Haiphong). I cannot take up this question here, but John Horne and Alan Kramer have certainly opened up new ways of studying such atrocities. John Horne and Alan Kramer (2001), *1914: A History of Denial*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.

‘The historian of the future, if this future saves us from these trying events we have experienced, will have a hard time understanding all this irrationality. How could French public opinion be abused to such an extent? The profound cause is surely to be found in the dislocation which, for ten years now, has led us to believe that anything is possible when our mindset is marked by an obsessive fear of the horrible. A mechanism of evocation seems to be built in. All that is needed is a date, the name of a place the mention of an attack, and, all of sudden, without anyone knowing who spoke first, the press and the public see before them emerge the habitual vision of torture and martyrs and, every time, some new trait that disconcerts.’<sup>66</sup>

It was this fear of the horrible and its gruesome distortions that Mus confronted in his quest to humanize the Vietnamese. Mus asked his readers to try to ‘see clearly’ [*voir clair*], to rise above the heat of the moment and the accusations of atrocity stories. If not, then the possibility of cool-headed judgments would be impossible and French decolonization would most assuredly be a savage one.<sup>67</sup>

‘As such, the reporter’s *montage*, all the details that hit our senses, and which, when received by the man in the street, the soldier, can more easily push him towards reprisals, followed by counter reprisals, all of this is nothing more than bloodthirsty literature. The sadism of a dislocated epoch is such that one would say that horror reigns and no one hesitates to provide [contradictory] proof. When then some dare to contest this version and to control its effects, the very horror of the text works against them, decorated civilians and soldiers though they may be. One is ready to exclude them from the community [for daring to call into question the premises of the horror stories].’<sup>68</sup>

Mus is, of course, referring to himself.

Mus’s articles in *Témoignage Chrétien* set off a heated debate. They provoked both liberal and Christian accolades and nationalist condemnation – on the Right and Left. Some saluted his courage and confirmed his critique, while others criticized him for taking up such controversial subjects while French boys were still dying bravely in the Indochinese rice fields for the nation.<sup>69</sup> On 26 November 1949, Mus’s long-time friend and colonial humanist, now High Commissioner for Indochina, Léon Pignon, wrote directly to the Minister of Overseas France registering his opposition to Mus’s articles in *Témoignage Chrétien*. While he recognized the need to humanize the Vietnamese, Pignon contested Mus’s macabre focus on the violence of war and the ‘counting of civilian victims’ of the massacres in

<sup>65</sup> See John Horne (2000), ‘Corps, lieux et nation : La France et l’invasion de 1914’, *Les Annales*, Vol 55, No 1, January–February, pp 73–109 (p 83 on Bloch); Marc Bloch (1997), ‘Réflexions d’un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de guerre’, in *Ecrits de guerre, 1914–1918*, Armand Colin, Paris, pp 169–184.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Mus (1949), ‘Les Vietnamiens aussi sont des hommes’, *Témoignage chrétien*, 11 November, p 2 (‘Ce qui explique ces déformations’).

<sup>67</sup> Paul Mus (1950), ‘Nos soldats d’Indochine et nous’, *Témoignage Chrétien*, 10 February, pp 1–2.

<sup>68</sup> Mus, *supra* note 54, at p 2.

<sup>69</sup> Several letters praising or taking issue with Mus’s essays can be found in Mus’s private papers at the Institut d’Asie Orientale in Lyon. Also see Jules Roy’s trenchant discussion of this phenomenon. Roy, *supra* note 49, at pp 464–492.



Hanoi and Saigon.<sup>70</sup> Pignon concluded his letter by stating that he did not see how the government could allow the head of the Colonial Academy to express such views in public and he asked that a copy of his letter be sent to Mus. It was. In effect, Léon Pignon had his long-time colleague, Paul Mus, removed from his position at the head of the Colonial Academy.<sup>71</sup> While there is no evidence in the archives or in his private papers to prove it, it is hard to believe that Mus did not willingly use Chegary's article on torture to leave the Colonial Academy to resume his academic career. The difference, however, is that Mus did not leave his war experiences behind him like so many social scientists at the time. He made them the subject of his next three books.

That said, no-one seems to have contested his deconstruction of the *hantise de l'horrible*, and precious few seemed to have grasped the importance of his *quête de l'humain*. As Mus looked back on it in 1968, 'in a climate of hatred someone who says the fellow on the other side isn't so bad is not well liked'.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Mus's humanist message in his *Témoignage chrétien* essays was quite simple, and some undoubtedly thought it naive:

'It's not simply a question of putting both sides back-to-back or "bending both under the weight of their faults". One must on the contrary stand them back up and allow them to look at themselves in the mirror, conscious, for both sides, that they are both human, together with their faults and dignity.'<sup>73</sup>

This was only one half of the equation, however. The other half was the need to understand how that colonial barrier dividing Humanity into two types had emerged in the first place. Only then, Mus felt, could it be destroyed effectively and the Franco-Vietnamese relationship saved from its worst enemies. This time, Mus went wide in space and time, but war was again central to his work not just on the Vietnamese but on the French themselves.

#### *'Le cas Loti': Paul Mus and the French colonial disconnect*

Mus took up this challenge in his little known *Le Destin de l'Union française: de l'Indochine à l'Afrique*.<sup>74</sup> The book was published in 1954, the year French colonial Indochina crumbled at Dien Bien Phu. It is a fascinating three-part analysis of the nature of French colonialism, its inherent violence and the difficulties of decolonization. Once again, Mus drew upon psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and history for his insights. But if *Sociologie d'une guerre* focused mainly on understanding Vietnamese nationalism, in *Le Destin* Mus is trying above all to grasp the French colonial mind.

Significantly, Mus dedicates the second part of his reflection in *Le Destin* – over 100 pages – to what he calls the 'psychology' of colonial violence and its

<sup>70</sup> This despite the fact that Pignon knew perfectly well that colonial authorities like himself had been using the massacres to promote the legitimacy of the French colonial cause.

<sup>71</sup> Haut Commissariat de France en Indochine à Ministre de la France d'Outre-mer, 'Articles de M. Paul Mus parus dans *Témoignage Chrétien*', Saigon, 26 November 1949, p 1, Paul Mus Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Paul Mus in *The New Journal* (Yale University), Vol 1, No 13, 13 May 1968, pp 8, 14.

<sup>73</sup> Paul Mus (1949), 'Qu'a démontré l'affaire d'Haiphong?' *Témoignage Chrétien*, 25 November, p 2.

<sup>74</sup> Mus, *supra* note 8.

dehumanizing effects (pp 115–220). Whereas Mus had focused his *Témoignage chrétien* critique on the *hantise de l'horrible* of the Franco-Vietnamese war in an effort to re-humanize the Vietnamese, in *Le Destin* he turned to Pierre Loti's disturbing account of the bloody French attack, occupation and conquest of Vietnam in 1883 as a way of tracking how the colonial process had first evacuated the Vietnamese from the French *regard*.

Loti created a scandal in the metropolis when he published a detailed account of the French naval attack on Vietnam in August 1883, the one which allowed the Republic to colonize all of the country. In a series of articles published in *Le Figaro* in 1883, Loti provided a blow-by-blow, graphic description of the violent seizure of Thuan An (the port leading to the imperial capital at Hue), as he witnessed it from the ship as an officer and was told of it afterwards by participants. A modern war correspondent before his time, Loti provided what may have been the first uncensored account of a Western battle in Vietnam. He wrote of the young French sailors from Brittany sent to fight the Vietnamese. He described their fears, as well as the extraordinary frenzy of violence that these young men unleashed on their adversary. Loti notes the eerie pleasure the French soldiers experienced when they began to pick off the Vietnamese as if they were hunting: 'one killed almost gaily, drunk on the cries, the action and the color of blood'. Indeed, much Vietnamese blood was spilled that day. As Loti wrote, 'We had killed a lot of them, it was almost gratuitous, like robbery'.<sup>75</sup> Yet Mus stressed that Loti also spoke of the compassion the French combatants simultaneously showed for the wounded Vietnamese left agonizing on the beach, and their remorse for the 'horrible things that had to be done' [*l'horrible qu'il a fallu faire*].<sup>76</sup>

The publication of Loti's account provoked a national and international outcry at the time. Jules Ferry's pro-colonial government faced a crisis, as European adversaries used it as proof of French atrocities and bad colonialism, while French opponents to Ferry exploited it to condemn colonialism as immoral, misguided and overly costly. Loti himself was recalled to Paris, was chastised and lost his job. Republican nationalists execrated him for daring to recount such negative things about France and the young men fighting for the nation. Angered, Loti shot back that what he had described that day was young men in the heat of battle. War, he said, was never pretty.

Paul Mus would have entirely agreed. It was profoundly ugly, he insisted. Indeed, *le cas Loti* clearly spoke to his own experience in describing colonial war in ways that displeased the powers that be.<sup>77</sup> Mus summarized Loti's text in *Le Destin*, including the heat of the battle, the fear of the soldiers, the scenes of carnage and the degeneration of the battle into a sport. He points out that all these details are strangely missing in the subsequent, indeed pacified military and colonial histories of this battle in particular and the French conquest in general,<sup>78</sup> not to mention the failed war of decolonization which he now opposed.

Of course, Mus was not the first writer to latch on to Loti's perturbing account

<sup>75</sup> For both the uncensored and censored versions of Loti's text, I rely on Loti (1991), 'Tonkin, la prise de Hué : Dans le campement des marins de l'Atalante', in *Gulliver*, 'Des écrivains découvrent le monde', No 5, January–March, pp 202–215, quotation on p 205.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p 204.

<sup>77</sup> Even *Le Monde* called for Mus's resignation from the Colonial Academy following the publication of his *Témoignage Chrétien* essays.

<sup>78</sup> Mus, *supra* note 8, at pp 116–118.

(which in later editions was sanitized). However, if Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau is looking for a social scientist who experienced war and applied those experiences to his post-war research, Mus is surely a case worth studying. Mus's analysis of 'le cas Loti' is long and complex. He presents a detailed study of the psychology of men in the heat of battle, deconstructs Loti's *récit* in its smallest details and engages in sophisticated theorization that goes beyond the scope of this essay.<sup>79</sup> Most importantly for our purposes here, Loti provided Mus with the perfect text for juxtaposing Mus's experience in France's colonial endgame with its violent debut in the nineteenth century. Mus saw in Loti's account of Thuan An the symbolic historical point at which the Vietnamese were first removed as men from the French purview via violence. It was in that violent paroxysm at Thuan An, he insisted, that the French stopped seeing the Vietnamese 'as human'. It marked the debut of the 'breakdown in human communication' between the two sides.<sup>80</sup>

What happened at Thuan An was also important to Mus because it marked the beginning of the French colonial moment and the end of the Vietnamese national one in what had until then been a proud and independent Vietnam operating on an equal footing with the rest of the world. Mus located at Thuan An in 1883 the symbolic moment at which the colonial project began to *dehumanize* those over whom it would rule. Violence was the context in which this occurred. As he wrote of the wider historical signification of Thuan An: 'The dehumanization of the world before us, the dehumanization that we project upon the men with whom we are dealing, is a terrible sign. By intention, by the effects it brings about, in us and against us, by boomerang, it undoubtedly has greater long-term consequences than the material violence itself'.<sup>81</sup> For Mus, Loti's text symbolized how that colonial barrier dividing men into colonizers and colonized first began to take form, historically:

'The major defect of a colonization of superiority – though it may well have had noble intentions – is its promptness to devalue its partners as well as its antagonists, and from which proceeds from its boundaries, as its always possible consequence, their "dehumanization" in the eyes of the conqueror if they encounter the other.'<sup>82</sup>

Mus goes on to record a wider historical reflection on the emergence of a colonial psychology. For him, Thuan An was a metaphor for a larger historical shift among the French and the Vietnamese. In this context, the French boys from Brittany were only small parts of a wider dehumanizing process, frontline soldiers in the spread and the imposition of the colonial phenomenon and colonial way of thinking. In the historical context in which they were now moving, Mus argued, their actions reflected the wider 'collectivity' and again violence bred it:

<sup>79</sup> Given the focus of this essay and space limitations, I cannot examine these questions here, or Mus's reflections on the question of historical reality and perception (something which was already present in his *Témoignage Chrétien* essays).

<sup>80</sup> Mus, *supra* note 8, at p 117. For Mus, there was more to it than just 'race'. He analysed how French soldiers were quite capable of killing other Frenchmen in brutal ways during the Second World War.

<sup>81</sup> Mus, *supra* note 8, at p 132.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p 205.

‘In black and white on paper, we would be in the presence of the most inhuman attitude. All sense of solidarity disappears between us – and by that I mean we, the French, who, in these circumstances, represent us and engage our collective responsibility – and these men whom we have in our sights, whom we now only see as jumping jacks, moving with animal reflexes. Our detachment in the horror, if not our dilettantism.’<sup>83</sup>

He explained that there was a psychological link between what was happening at the local level and the development of a wider colonial psyche: ‘The colonial psychology appears then as a wider psychology. It is a “field” of that which we are, or of that which we would become, if transported into another milieu.’<sup>84</sup>

And the process cut both ways. If, by exteriorization, the colonizer ‘devalued’ the Vietnamese he found before him on the battlefield, the colonial encounter dehumanized the colonizer himself. This is how the French view began to change, and for the worse, he continued: ‘Isn’t it above all from the vantage point of the spectator and perhaps only from his viewpoint, that humanity has disappeared?’<sup>85</sup> Comparing the ‘colonial laugh’ to the ‘atrocious laugh’ which Karl Marx had evoked to describe the dehumanizing effects of capitalism on humans, Mus asked whether ‘this would be, in both cases, the same reaction to *Entemenschung*, dehumanization: the reaction of the beneficiary. The search for humanity in this way would be lost?’<sup>86</sup>

This wider *déshumanisation colonialiste*, as Mus put it, would have profound implications for how the French would view the Vietnamese during the rest of the colonial period and interpret their attempts at national liberation. Indeed, over time, the removal of the Vietnamese as equals would give rise to a deeper ‘colonial disconnect’ [*le déphasage colonial*], one which would prevent the French from grasping the point of view of the ‘colonized’ and the historical shifts that were occurring during the colonial period itself – ‘The Annamese are just waiting for us to return’, as one of his colleagues put it in 1945. The French underestimated the men they faced and overevaluated their own point of view, world view, and indeed themselves. It was linked metaphorically to that founding, dehumanizing moment Mus saw in what Loti wrote in 1883:

‘We thus are paying the price for the ease with which we went trap shooting at Thuan An or at Nghe Tinh in 1930. It’s their memory, when all things have changed, that led us to count on these “sparrows”. Socrates warned the Greeks against making such analogous assessments of their Asian adversaries.’<sup>87</sup>

If Mus had missed Yen Bay and Nghe-Tinh in the 1930s, in *Le Destin* he was convinced that these uprisings had been harbingers of things to come, and formed the vital link between Thuan An and Dien Bien Phu.<sup>88</sup> And all of this was more

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 119–120 (my emphasis).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p 127.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p 177.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p 127.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p 134.

<sup>88</sup> The paralleling of war and hunting is worthy of a separate study. Note that on 5 May 1954, as he worked around the clock to sew young Vietnamese boys back together during the battle of Dien Bien Phu, Dr Ton That Tung confided to his diary that ‘only a few years ago, in Viet Bac, they (the French) hunted us mercilessly. Now they are falling to our guns like sparrows. This reversal of roles rejoices me.’ Ton That Tung (1980), *Reminiscences of a Vietnamese Surgeon*, Foreign Language Publishing House, Hanoi, p 48.

important to Mus for understanding the French colonial state of mind than the Vietnamese national one.<sup>89</sup>

Mus's use of the Loti case was of course linked to his critique of France's difficult decolonization in the present. He consciously uses Thuan An to analyse the 'Franco-Vietnamese misunderstanding' of 1945–54, the title of his last subsection on Loti.<sup>90</sup> For Mus, the beginning and the end of the colonial moment were inextricably linked in blood. The years 1883 and 1945 were parallel historical signposts, the first being the date at which the dehumanization inaugurated by violent conquest began, the second marking when French decolonization should have begun. What troubled Mus was that, rather than grasping the reality of decolonization, the French had effectively attempted to re-conquer and re-colonize Vietnam in 1945. French policy, in other words, was going against history.

Worse, as Mus drives home in the last part of his text on Loti, the continued denial of the Vietnamese nation only reinforced the colonial disconnect set in motion 'at Thuan An'. Like *la hantise de l'horrible* in his *Témoignage chrétien* essays, Mus uses Thuan An to call for the need to break the colonial mental block. This could only be done by getting the French to see the Vietnamese as men and women, and not as children or 'subjects'. Mus uses the details of Loti's account to show that the Vietnamese fought bravely that day and that they fought *as men*, and as Mus and his colonial section had fought on the Loire in 1940. The violence of the battlefield in 1883 and the late 1940s allows Mus to re-humanize the Other, turning 'les Viet' into men with faces, *both* in the past and in the present:

'Out of respect for our prestige, I will refer to Jean Dupuis as a merchant (his boldness makes this clear) and I would ask the Vietnamese to do as much. However, are we in the end so hemmed in by our defensive complex, perhaps because of a lack of confidence in ourselves, that we can't understand the inevitable reaction of these same Vietnamese when they see us continually present and even represent them to ourselves as pirates what were in fact national troops who, on their territory, were opposed to our conquest? By the term pirates (and when we don't add to it Chinese pirates) do we mean the Thuan An garrison, the provincial forces recruited from neighbouring villages, something like ours stationed along the Maginot line? By pirates, do we mean the royal regiments arriving from the capital marching with cannons? The [pirate] formula is not just for internal consumption, since we found it being used in *Le Figaro* in response to European papers critical of our actions [Thuan An in 1883]: *It was an affair involving the death of a few Annamese pirates.*'<sup>91</sup>

Thus for Mus, this 'colonial dehumanization' not only set the psychological stage for the colonial project itself by placing some men above others, but it was also

<sup>89</sup> Something which was lost on many of Mus's mainly American followers in the 1960s and 1970s. Frances Fitzgerald confirmed to me, after reading this text, that she never knew much about the details of Mus's French background, his break with the powers that be in the late 1940s, the influences of Alain or the Second World War, or even the fact that he headed the French Colonial Academy. I am currently working on an essay on the impact of Mus's ideas in the American anti-war movement and post-Second World War South East Asian studies.

<sup>90</sup> The book was published in the fourth trimester of 1954, thus after the battle of Dien Bien Phu in May and the signing of the Geneva Accords in July of 1954 ending the Franco-Vietnamese War.

<sup>91</sup> Mus, *supra* note 8, at p 217 (italicized by Mus in the original).



one of the main reasons why it was so hard for the French to decolonize themselves later on. Few listened to Mus at the time. In a meeting with Charles de Gaulle in 1945, the General sent his academic packing, insisting that the French would return because they were 'stronger'.<sup>92</sup>

### Conclusion

Mus returned with a passion to Alain in the last years of his life, as he tried to make sense of these wars that had so profoundly marked his life, shaped his humanism and taken his only son. Alain is everywhere in Mus's sorrowful *Guerre sans visage*. Yet despite the profound chagrin of losing a child, Mus could still join Alain in proclaiming that war had reinforced *l'amitié universelle*. Through it all, Mus never lost hope in *l'Homme*, whether French, Vietnamese or Algerian. *Chacun se construit de ce que lui apporte l'ami*, is how he put a face on his *guerres sans visages* on the last page of the book, and rendered homage to his son.<sup>93</sup> Whether one agrees or not, in the end Mus effectively took Alain's wartime humanity a step further by trying to tear down the barrier dividing men into two unequal categories, the Algerians and Vietnamese on the one side, and the French on the other. Jean-Marie Domenach, the editor of *Esprit* and one of Mus's friends, best captured in one sentence Mus's humanism in the tribute he paid him in 1969:

'Paul Mus helped us to understand not only Asia, not only our own country and the burden it placed on other peoples, but he also taught what should be our intellectual task and what could be a humanism tailored to the world today.'<sup>94</sup>

He meant a fully decolonized one. Even Orientalists could imagine this. The experience of war helped Paul Mus to achieve this understanding.

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<sup>92</sup> As told to Jean-Marie Domenach (1969), 'Paul Mus', *Esprit*, No 10, October, p 605.

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